



Alan Purves

Hide & Squeak

(Brokken Records)

Drummer and percussionist, also - on this album, almost exclusively - "man orchestra extraordinaire", Alan Purves presents on Hide & Squeak (a transparent play on words) an ever-changing and quite vivacious sound picture which hides a solid architecture and coherent intentions behind multi-coloured, often funny, clothes.

During the past decade I've had the chance to listen to Purves the drummer-percussionist in a variety of contexts, and I've always appreciated his appropriate contribution, also his great skills as a colourist.

The album titled *And The Cowgirls Kept On Dancing*, which he co-lead with (prepared) piano player Albert van Veenendal under the moniker Two Al's, featured a quite different - and for this writer, decidedly unexpected - side of Purves, playing "percussion, squeaky toys, brim bram, little instruments".

Hide & Squeak is in some ways the continuation and the full realization of musical climates first explored on *And The Cowgirls Kept On Dancing*. And while on the previous album some of the sound sources remained shrouded in mystery, here listeners will often have to wonder what instrument(s) they're listening to, with strange-sounding "keyboards", "basses" and "double basses", even "guitars", that are absent in the album's list of featured instruments but keep on playing side-by-side with more recognizable marimbas, flutes, melodicas, kalimbas, vocals, and woodblocks.

While not the sole point of interest, the timbral side of the music is one of the main attractions here, the great instrumental variety being one of the "meanings" of the tale told by Purves. Happy combinations of opposites abound, with metallic, bright-sounding percussion coupled with deep drums, with a "layered" dimension that'll keep listeners

intrigued well beyond their first listening sessions. There are many simple melodies, with a decidedly "folk" and "ethnic" slant, all under an aesthetic concept I'll call "serious fun".

This is an album that can be comfortably listened to at medium-loud volume levels thanks to a very musical dynamic mastering by Chris Weeda, and great recording and mixing work by Davey Norket, which highlight the music at its best. There is great use of echoes and reverbs, and a creative use of panning, which gives the album a quasi-psychedelic aura while making it sound at times as quite similar to the "whoosh" dimension of early electronic music.

The album is not at all difficult to listen to, it just sounds... "highly personal". Something Purves appears to be aware of, as it's made apparent here and there in the album's liner notes - "(...) this (I want to call it) music" - where Purves appears to anticipate one's skeptical reaction to the music. Me, I'm sure that, given the chance, this album will easily find its audience.

This is the kind of album where a full description can only be redundant and repetitive, so I'll just give readers a hint.

Who's There opens the album with strings and metals in glissando, mysterious voices, a "keyboard" playing chords, percussion, then bass notes framing the ending.

Ghost Ship starts with a bass figure that walks quite slow, then a melody played by flutes which at times sounds like a slowed-down jig, then something sounding like a glockenspiel playing chords, something sounding like vibes playing the melody first played by flutes, there's a fine ending with very melodic-sounding percussion.

7 ate 9 has a lively tempo, chords, drums, a "folk" melody performed by marimba and pennywhistle, then marimba performing in a different time signature, fat drums, dog barks (?), the composition making great use of rhythmic variations. There's a rhythmic interlocking of different melodies, with what to me sounds like a "pygmy chant" as a closing motif.

In A Place In Space features a melody for "space flute" performed in a silent environment, with only the "whoosh" of space vehicles traveling the stereo field. A delicate-sounding melody, and there's also a passage for tympani. A very evocative moment.

Zombie Wackers has martial tempo, a bass riff, marimba, animal noises, the whole sounding quite "tribal" and hypnotic.

Under The Bramble Tree starts with a hummed melody, metals acting as a counterpoint, and harmonica performing a lazy, simple "folk" melody.

Speeding Down & Slowing Up starts with a bass figure acting as a pedal, percussion, layered vocals, tempi that - as per the song's title - speed up and slow down, an intermezzo for metals and bird noises that reminded me - I can't really say why - of a "jungle" version of The Modern Jazz Quartet. Cut, almost techno, then it's back to vociferous vocals. This is a song that successfully sounds like a mash-up of different styles and cultures.

Crystal Eyes opens with metals, something that sounds like a shakuachi, woodblocks, then a fine melody appearing out of the blue. A "splice" of conga/snare drum played brushes. For this writer, one of the album's high points.

Pig Happy has some pig noises in $\frac{3}{4}$ backed by accordion and a very melancholic-sounding melody for glockenspiel sounding like coming from a musical box that's one of the most beautiful moments on the album. After a carillon solo it's the accordion again, followed by an aria for pig quartet.

Gunga's Din is an episode that stays with you long after the album has ended. A "double bass" figure with "slapback" echo, metals, then a "dry" double bass playing "swing", cymbals, shaker, then a "B" section with squeaks, the bass playing an ostinato, effects. The compositions then alternates the "A" and "B" sections. Another high point of the album.

Amar Rock'n has a melody for flutes backed by percussion, a quite bizarre effect I can't really find the right words to describe, bird noises, melodic flute, tiny tablas, then the composition orchestrates with great timbral inventiveness the previous design.

Still Standing Still (at 694 km/s) is another high point. It starts with wood and metal instruments playing single notes, a melodic phrase, chords, a fresh-sounding melody, drums acting as counterpoint, then it goes from rubato to strict tempo; at 3' 50" a long note appears, sounding as bagpipes with backing by kalimba for a very poetic-sounding moment. Great!

Till Squeak Shuts Up has a very strict rhythmic design, a melodic air that sounds as played on an ocarina, lotsa percussion.

Hide & Squeak is a Babel of bird voices, the whole reminding me - again, I can't tell you why - of an old jazz record, a 78rpm from the roaring 20s, featuring an ensemble of clarinets and muted trumpets, with the solo part - originally performed on a clarinet, or violin - performed by a bird. Quite bizarre!

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